

THE PR IN CSR: ASSESSING PERCEPTIONS OF PARTNERSHIPS VERSUS
DONATIONS IN CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY INITIATIVES

A Thesis

by

MICHAELLA RAQUEL WALTON

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Chair of Committee,	Joshua B. Barbour
Committee Members,	Damion Waymer
	Suresh Ramanathan
Head of Department,	James K. Barge

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ABSTRACT

As Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives become more common, practitioners need evidence to help them determine how initiatives are perceived. Research indicates factors such as involvement with an initiative's issue and the type of initiative have effects on outcomes such as perceptions of effectiveness and attitudes. A 2 X 2 between-subjects factorial experiment was conducted in which participants ($N=433$) were shown a CSR advertisement. After viewing the advertisement, participants were given a posttest that rated their perceptions of initiative effectiveness and their attitudes toward the initiative.

Results indicated that both types of CSR were perceived positively. However, partnerships had an indirect effect on positive perceptions of both attitudes and initiative effectiveness through long-term commitment. That is, partnerships had a positive indirect effect when participants indicated that the sponsoring corporation was invested in helping the cause for an extended period of time, as compared to one-time initiatives such as a campaign donation. Inconsistent with the hypotheses, involvement did not moderate perceptions of the corporation's commitment and thus did not affect perceptions of initiative effectiveness or attitudes. Results suggest citizens are likely to perceive partnerships and donations in positive ways, regardless of their involvement; however, partnership initiatives have stronger positive, indirect effects on perceptions because they are more likely to indicate a long-term commitment to the cause than one-time donation initiatives.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Corporate Social Responsibility Pervasiveness

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives have become more common in the last decade than any other time in history (Becker-Olsen & Hill, 2005). Though CSR campaigns were first introduced around 1970 as an added bonus, now most large corporations are expected to have a CSR program (Rice & Atkin, 2012). The increase in the number of corporations implementing CSR initiatives reflects an assumption that individuals will favor corporations who contribute to environmental or social causes outside the realm of normal business practices (Coombs & Holladay, 2006).

Corporations try to capitalize on these initiatives as a way to increase their public reputation, and they may do so with good reason; according to a survey of corporate public reputation, most consumers surveyed (73%) reported they would recommend companies that they believe to have successful CSR programs (Which companies have... 2013).

CSR initiatives are justified in terms of their benefits to the corporation. For example, Niall Fitzgerald, the former CEO of Unilever, stated that “Corporate Social Responsibility is a hard-edged economic decision; not because...people are forcing [companies] to do it [but] because it is good for business” (Azhar, 2012, p. 1). Travis Engen, CEO of Alcan, suggest “It is in the best interest [of the corporation] to contribute to the community” (Azhar, 2012, p. 1). As corporations continue to implement CSR, their intent to “do well by doing good” (Coombs & Holladay, 2013, p. 12) is a way to

obtain tangible results from citizens by way of image bolstering. Increasingly, CSR programs are seen as a promising alternative to traditional public relations and marketing because they offer additional community benefits to the public (Coombs & Holladay, 2006).

The proliferation of these initiatives has made reaching the intended audiences more difficult, however. An increase in CSR initiative prevalence has meant greater competition and higher initiative expectations from the public (Cheney, Roper & May, 2007). Research suggests that as CSR becomes more pervasive among corporations, individuals have become more skeptical of the effectiveness of these initiatives (Becker-Olsen & Hill, 2005). This increase in skepticism places more pressure on corporations to prove the initiative's contributions (May, 2008). Also, CSR initiatives can backfire if they do not satisfy the public's expectations (Clark, 2000). CSR literature suggests that although consumers are likely to reward corporations with impactful initiatives, they are equally likely to "punish" those who appear insincere in their involvement (Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001; Simmons & Becker-Olsen, 2005). Therefore, as these initiatives become more prevalent, corporations must design CSR initiatives that clearly demonstrate their effectiveness and genuine desire toward benefitting the cause.

Contributions to the CSR Literature

CSR initiatives differ widely (Waddock, 2008), and research is needed that explores an individual's perceptions of the various types of CSR (Alter & Oppenheimer, 2008; Dean, 2004; Drumwright, 1996; Lafferty & Goldsmith, 1999). Because these initiatives can be created with a wide range of different features and still be classified as

CSR, an important, yet unanswered, question remains: whether certain types of initiatives have more of a positive influence on individuals' perceptions than others (Chaudhry & Krishnan, 2007; Webb & Mohr, 1998, Waddock, 2008). For example, corporate/non-profit organization (NPO) partnerships are increasingly common, but it is not yet clear how such partnerships are perceived. In fact, although the exact number is not known, industry data has shown the implementation of corporate/NPO partnerships as CSR initiatives has increased in the last 15 years (Mutch & Aitken, 2009; O'Connor & Shumate, 2010). Thus, research about perceptions of these partnerships is needed to inform practitioners of whether or not they fare better among public opinion when compared to other types of CSR. To that end, this study compares partnerships and donations to determine whether individuals perceive one more favorably than the other based on the features within each type of CSR.

To do so, the thesis is composed of the following chapters. Chapter two is a review of the literature regarding previously-studied concepts that relate to the present study: perceptions of corporate commitment, personal involvement with an issue and factors that affect perceptions of initiative effectiveness as well as attitudes toward the initiative. From these concepts, this study deduced a question based on current trends within the public relations industry: whether or not partnership CSR initiatives are in fact more positively perceived than donation CSR initiatives. Specifically, corporate/NPO partnerships were thought to result in more positive attitudes and greater perceived CSR effectiveness than corporate donations based on features that suggest strong corporate commitment, a characteristic shown to resonate with consumers (L'Etang, 2004).

Previous literature suggested that if individuals perceived a genuine commitment from a corporation toward a cause, they were more likely to attribute positive feelings toward that corporation (Crawford, 1973; Lafferty & Goldsmith, 1999). Accordingly, the chapter hypothesizes that commitment should mediate the effect of CSR type on perceptions of effectiveness and attitudes toward the initiative (See Figure 1-1).

These proposed perceptions of commitment as a mediator were also thought to be affected by a moderator: involvement with a cause (See Figure 1-1). Based on previous involvement literature (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), chapter two also hypothesized that an individual's involvement with the sponsored cause would act as a moderator on perceptions of corporate commitment. Particularly, high involvement with the cause was thought to increase perceptions of corporate commitment more so than low involvement (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). It was also hypothesized that involvement might moderate the effects of partnerships versus donations on individuals' perceptions of initiatives indirectly through perceptions of commitment.

Chapter three includes the methodology used to study these factors. A 2 X 2 factorial design combined high and low involvement with partnership and donation CSR type. An omnibus ANOVA test and the Hayes PROCESS macro (version 2.11) test were used to compare the conditions per each hypothesis. Chapter four then explains the results of the experiment and finally chapter five discusses the meaning of these results in terms of practical implications for both public relations practitioners and future research opportunities for scholars.

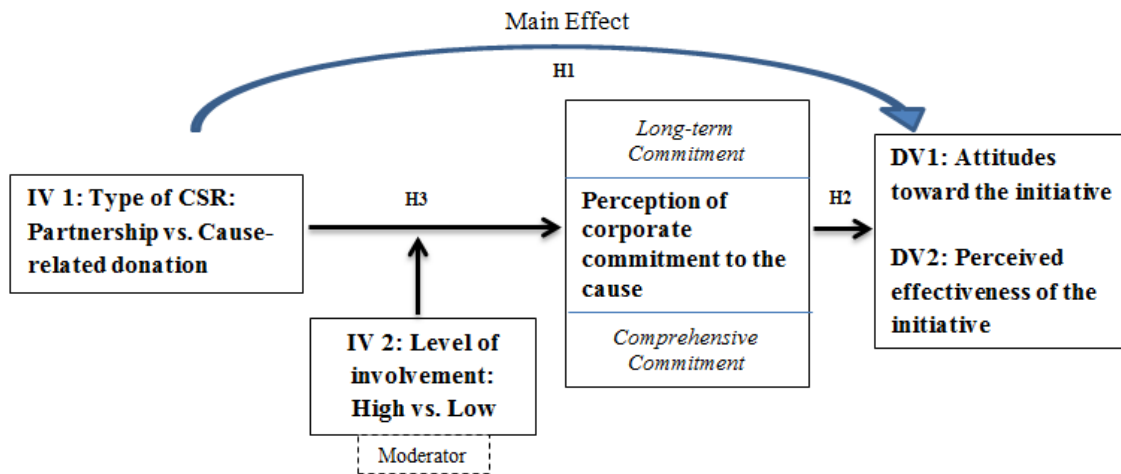


Figure 1-1. Proposed model of partnerships' effects on attitudes toward the initiative and perceived effectiveness of the initiative.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Factors That Affect Perceptions of CSR Initiatives

Previous research has focused on many different features and functions of CSR initiatives. For example, some scholars have examined CSR as it relates to intra-organizational practice and executive power, as well as the creation of public policy and protection of the public interest (Conrad & Abbott, 2007). Others have looked at the ethical complexities that CSR poses for public relations practitioners (May, 2011, Cheney, Roper & May, 2007; Waymer, 2012). Still others have looked at the varying levels of effectiveness that different types of initiatives possess on the public's perceptions by way of different forms of communication (O'Connor & Shumate, 2010; Heath, Toth, & Waymer, 2010). More specifically to this end, scholars have focused on individuals' perceptions of initiative effectiveness and attitudes toward these initiatives in an effort to understand the effectiveness of CSR for corporate image bolstering (Lafferty & Goldsmith, 1999; Priester & Petty, 2003; Trent & Greer, 2001; Waddock, 2008). Scholars note that an initiative must first prove its effectiveness before an individual is likely to attribute positive feelings toward it (Priester & Petty, 2003; Trent & Greer, 2001). Second, it is possible that an individual may view an initiative as effective, yet still remain apathetic toward it. In this case, indifference may stem from their lack of interest or lack of involvement with the particular cause or their inability to deem it as personally relevant (Brown & Dacin, 1997). As a consequence, corporations

must do more than promote that an initiative exists to achieve positive attitudes toward an initiative.

Initiative Effectiveness

Lafferty and Goldsmith (1999) defined initiative effectiveness as whether or not the public perceives the CSR initiative to be able to fulfill the corporation's commitment to the cause. Studies have examined individuals' perceptions of initiative effectiveness by understanding the relationship between an individual and a cause or between a corporation and a cause. For example, Menon and Kahn (2001) found that campaigns were perceived as more effective when individuals showed a strong interest in the cause being supported. Regardless of the amount of help the corporation provided, the initiative was not perceived as positively or deemed as effective when the individual did not value the cause itself. Alternatively, Becker-Olsen and Hill (2007) examined the relationship or level of 'fit' between a corporate source and their sponsored cause. Their findings suggested that individuals tend to perceive initiatives as more effective when the corporation's mission naturally relates to its reason for sponsoring the cause. Previous research on individuals' perceptions of initiative effectiveness have thus been measured based on the individual's level of interest to the particular cause, as well as individual perceptions of the corporate sponsor's relationship or reason for promoting the cause.

Attitudes Toward CSR Initiatives

On the other hand, studies related to individuals' attitudes toward an initiative have centered on which features are required for successful initiative construction.

Several have examined how corporations create initiatives based on the presence of certain features that have been found to resonate with individuals (Drumwright, 1996; Dean, 2004; L'Etang, 2004). In particular, one feature present in many successful initiatives is a strong corporate commitment toward the cause (L'Etang, 2004; Drumwright, 1996). Dean (2004) examined attitudes toward commitment levels by comparing conditional corporate donations (those that are based on a percentage of profits) to unconditional corporate donations (a one-time lump sum independent of profits). He found that unconditional donations from a corporation with a neutral reputation were perceived more favorably because they were not restricted a corporation profiting prior to making the donation. Additionally, Webb and Mohr (1998) found that the total length of time a corporation committed to a cause became a cue for individuals to determine corporate motives: long term commitments were viewed with better intentions than short or one-time commitments, which were seen as merely a way to increase sales.

Understanding how individuals perceive these initiative characteristics is part of a larger effort to gauge how corporations can effectively communicate themselves to the public. Marchand (1998) suggests corporations as institutions ideally strive to develop a “charitable or educational character that is marked by its longevity, charitable behavior, and high levels of legitimacy” (p. 165). To accomplish this, strategic institutional communication is required. Thus, when a corporation communicates its CSR initiative, it “serves to reproduce understanding and acceptance of the institution [as a whole] within society” (Lammers and Barbour, 2006, p. 364).

This research makes clear that it is important to study perceptions of initiative effectiveness and attitudes toward the initiative. People typically do not view an initiative with a positive attitude without first viewing it as effective or credible (Priester & Petty, 2003). Thus, an understanding of both perceptions of initiative effectiveness and attitudes toward an initiative are needed for comprehensive understanding of how individuals perceive initiatives as a whole. From this, companies can create positive attitudes toward their CSR programs and will most likely benefit in terms of sales and recommendations from consumers (Which companies have..., 2013).

Though CSR research broadly covers a variety of issues, studies interested in the effects of different types of initiatives' on perceptions are rare. This research looks to address some of the current, unanswered questions about differences between types of CSR. First, it posits:

H1a: Participants will report more positive attitudes toward a partnership than a one-time donation.

H1b: Participants will report greater perceptions of effectiveness for a partnership than one-time donation.

To understand why one type of CSR may lead to more positive outcomes than another, the different features inherent within the CSR types must be examined. In line with previous studies, this study expected the perception of a strong corporate commitment to a cause would indirectly affect how individuals perceive initiative effectiveness and their attitudes toward the initiative (Dean, 2004; Webb & Mohr, 1998).

Perceptions of Corporate Commitment

Not surprisingly, research suggests individuals view trustworthy sources as more persuasive (McGuire, 1969). Previous findings suggest corporations who follow through with their commitments, whether these are related to their business mission or a CSR initiative, are perceived as more trustworthy and thus more favorably among consumers (Dean, 2004).

A Gallup poll (2004) found that consumer confidence in big business is currently low, with only seven percent of respondents claiming they had a “great deal” and 17 percent saying they had “quite a lot” of confidence in major corporations (Roper Center, 2004). Additionally, the amount of companies believed to actually be making an impactful contribution through their CSR program dropped from 2012 to 2013 (Which companies have... 2013). Forehand and Grier (2003) conceptualized this current “disbelief of marketer actions” as consumer skepticism (p. 350). This skepticism, based on examples of consumer distrust in the past, has the power to taint perceptions and negatively affect reputation by applying a critical lens toward corporate business practices as a whole (May, 2008; Skarmas & Leonidou, 2013).

To counter consumer skepticism, many corporations have implemented CSR initiatives as a public relations strategy to regain consumer trust and to boost their public image (Kim & Reber, 2008; May, 2008). Scholars and consulting practitioners state that in order to achieve quality results, companies should make clear their genuine commitment to the cause (Dean, 2004). Additionally, L’Etang (2004) argues that a corporation’s level of commitment to a cause is a major factor in determining whether

individuals view their CSR initiative to be exploiting a cause for reputational gain or truly benefitting it.

Webb and Mohr (1998) found that the total length of time a corporation was committed to a cause was a cue for individuals to determine a corporation's motives: long term commitments were viewed with better intentions than short or one-time commitments, which were seen merely as a way to increase sales. Further, campaigns that lasted more than several years were regarded as credible, whereas those that were half a year or less were considered weak or unreliable (Drumwright, 1996). In sum, a long-term commitment allows corporate managers to create an enduring strategy to truly benefit the cause, and consumers take note of this (Dean, 2004). The effects of a long-term initiative not only increase its credibility among individuals, but also allow for greater effort toward befitting the cause and thus better overall branding of the corporate sponsor (Du, Bhattacharya & Sen, 2010).

If a genuine commitment to a cause is not apparent within an initiative, individuals may be led to believe that its purpose is merely for publicity rather than a desire to benefit society (Dean, 2004). Examples of failed initiatives have tended to place too much emphasis on branding the corporate sponsor as "beneficial" and too little time actually benefitting the cause (Drumwright, 1996). An unequal display of commitment, particularly a greater focus on the corporation's needs over the needs of the cause, led individuals to feel that the corporate sponsor was not genuinely interested in benefitting society and instead merely using CSR to benefit their image. In this case, the question of whose interests are represented and whose are marginalized becomes

increasingly important, yet difficult, to answer (Boyd & Waymer, 2011). There is no denying that corporations expect to benefit from CSR, but the genuine interest in society also needs to be apparent.

Different levels of commitment seem to be represented within two types of initiatives in particular: corporate/NPO partnerships and one-time donations. This study takes a deeper look at partnerships as compared to donations to determine if different levels of commitment are perceived, and how that might affect an individual's overall perceptions of an initiative.

Selecting a CSR Approach: Partnerships as Compared to Other Types of CSR

Among CSR initiatives, corporate/non-profit partnerships are growing more than any other (Mutch & Aitken, 2009; O'Connor & Shumate, 2010). This type of CSR consists of a for-profit corporation paired with a non-profit organization in an effort to benefit both parties (Shumate & O'Connor, 2010). The non-profit organization benefits by receiving financial sponsorship, and the corporation assumes its reputation will improve after displaying concern for society.

Many scholars assume that CSR can only be wholly developed in the form of a partnership as it allows for a new exploration of societal roles beyond the corporation's business interests (Nijhof et al., 2007). This study expects that two features of partnerships distinguish them from other common types of CSR, particularly one-time donations. These include their (a) long-term commitment and (b) comprehensive commitment.

Long-term Commitment

To create a partnership initiative, a good deal of time is required to build a relationship between members of different sectors (Nijhof et al., 2007). Unlike other forms of CSR such as a one-time donation, entering into a corporate-non-profit partnership is characterized by two entities agreeing to make a commitment to a shared interest.

Corporations entering into partnerships understand that long-lasting image benefits are rarely immediate (Shumate & O'Connor, 2010). Though corporations may gain social capital through their initial affiliation with NPOs, the actualization of these benefits usually occurs over a period of time (May, 2011; Nijhof et al., 2007). A partnership's long-term commitment to the cause is likely to be seen more as a genuine effort than donations as it allows for the utilization of more resources over a greater period of time. This long-term commitment thereby bodes well for the overall success of the initiative in terms of both benefitting the cause and the corporation's reputation, combatting the issue of consumer skepticism mentioned previously (Ihlen et al., 2011). Conversely, cause-related donations are typically one-time initiatives that seek to benefit the cause on the corporation's terms. Based on their short time-frame, they are less likely to be perceived as genuinely committed to the cause, more likely to be deemed as Greenwashing, and their reputational benefits are often fleeting-- similar to the duration of their campaigns.

Comprehensive Commitment

The second feature that partnerships seem to possess over other types of CSR is their ability to address both corporate and public interests simultaneously, or a comprehensive commitment. Scholarship suggests individuals perceive a false dichotomy between these two interests based on which sector an institution exists in. This is because most view the non-profit, private sector and the for-profit, public sector as two separate entities with different missions and goals (Waddock, 2007; Christiansen 2007). While it may be true that a corporation's priority is financial success and a nonprofit's priority is social or environmental impact, it ignores the fact that both entities must actually maintain a combination of social and financial interests in order to survive. For example, any corporation's products or services are made for the benefit of consumers, whether they attempt to make everyday functions more efficient, fulfill basic needs, or simply make human lifestyles more enjoyable. This signifies that while a corporation is surely interested in its sales and financial standing, its purpose for existence is to benefit citizen consumers by making their lives easier or more enjoyable, thereby demonstrating a societal interest. Similarly, all nonprofits rely on some sort of financial funding in order to fulfill their basic, socially-driven mission. Though their publicized priority lies in benefitting the community, they require regular financial stability to perform these functions. Most individuals tend to classify organizations as either part of the for-profit, public sector or the nonprofit, private sector, never imagining one body can maintain both priorities or be a member of both sectors.

However, we can see that while NPOs and corporations have different priorities, both a societal and a financial focus are necessary for each entity to function successfully.

Corporations entering into partnerships also understand they will be held publicly accountable for providing all that was promised to the NPO. As nonprofit organizations are their own entities with their own voice, they can easily publicize any shortcomings or false promises made by the corporation through their own channels of communication, which would inevitably harm the corporation's image. Unlike a cause-related campaign such as "illiteracy awareness" or charitable donations to "underprivileged inner-city youth", a partner NPO holds their sponsor corporation highly accountable for delivering on their promises, especially those made publicly. This publicized commitment toward the NPO is also more likely to contribute toward the public's view of the partnership's genuineness, which serves to directly combat the previous issue of consumer skepticism (Hardy et al., 2003).

In most donation CSR initiatives, the idea that 'the primary focus of the corporation is economic' reigns true; donations are heavily concentrated on the benefit of the corporation and less focused on the cause (Jacobs, 1995). For example, donations are structured around the corporation's campaign schedule and the amount donated is often conditional to a corporation's profit margin from that campaign. Partnerships, however, allow one combined entity to address both sectors' interests simultaneously, thereby promoting a comprehensive commitment from both the corporation and the non-profit. By combining the efforts of players in both sectors, partnerships are able to

address this false dichotomy of having to choose between social or economic priorities (Ihlen et al., 2011).

By its very nature, the general concept of CSR is defined as a company's commitment to minimizing or eliminating detrimental effects and maximizing long-term favorable effects (Mohr, Webb & Harris, 2001). Based on the features of long-term commitment and comprehensive commitment that partnerships possess, this study suggests partnerships differ from other common types of CSR such as cause-related donations, which are often short-term.

In this study, participants were expected to perceive greater commitment from the sponsoring corporation when viewing a CSR advertisement that includes a partnership versus a CSR advertisement that includes a donation. Based on previous studies, participants who perceive higher levels of corporate commitment within a CSR campaign maintained more positive attitudes toward the initiative and higher levels of perceived CSR effectiveness (L'Etang, 2004; Webb & Mohr, 1998). The present study argued that partnerships have two characteristics that suggest commitment: their long-term nature and their comprehensive quality of tending to both social and economic interests. Therefore:

H2a: The effect of CSR type on attitudes toward the initiative will be mediated by the perception of long-term corporate commitment to the cause.

H2b: The effect of CSR type of perceptions of initiative effectiveness will be mediated by the perception of a long-term corporate commitment to the cause.

H2c: The effect of CSR type on attitudes toward the initiative will be mediated by the perception of a comprehensive corporate commitment to the cause.

H2d: The effect of CSR type on perceptions of initiative effectiveness will be mediated by the perception of a comprehensive corporate commitment to the cause.

Involvement

Another factor that may influence how individuals perceive different types of CSR in different ways is their involvement with an issue. Involvement is defined as the personal relevance that a person has in a particular situation or issue (Petty, Cacioppo & Goldman, 1981). Petty and Cacioppo (1986) suggest individuals who have different levels of involvement with an issue should perceive the organization's CSR initiative in different ways. Specifically, high involvement in a particular situation or with an issue often affects individuals' attitudes in a more positive way than low involvement (Petty, Cacioppo & Goldman, 1981).

Involvement also plays a role in combatting consumer skepticism. When determining whether a CSR initiative is either credible or superficial, individuals will look to understand the motives of the corporation (Dean, 2004). Friestad and Wright (1994) modeled how individuals attempt to understand a corporation's motives; they argued that when a person is confronted with a message containing a corporation's explanation of their societal involvement, he or she is more likely to cognitively elaborate on the message. Additionally, Becker-Olsen & Hill (2005) found that the more

involved with a cause a person is, the more a corporate sponsorship will resonate with them, making them more likely to have positive attitudes toward the initiative.

To relate previous research to this study, a participant who is considered to be more involved with an issue should be more likely to perceive higher levels of corporate commitment, whereas low levels of involvement should not yield a noticeable difference in commitment perceptions (Becker-Olsen & Hill, 2005). Higher levels of commitment may then translate into greater perceptions of initiative effectiveness and more positive attitudes toward the initiative (H2). Therefore:

H3a: Participants will perceive greater long-term commitment from a partnership when in a high involvement condition than when in a low involvement condition.

H3b: Participants will perceive greater comprehensive commitment from a partnership when in a high involvement condition than when in a low involvement condition.

In addition, involvement may also play a role in the overall effectiveness of CSR type on attitudes toward the initiative and perceptions of initiative effectiveness, the outcome variables. That is, there may be an indirect effect of interaction between involvement and the outcome variables through long-term and/or comprehensive commitment. Therefore:

H3c: The interaction between involvement and CSR type will have an indirect effect on the outcome variables through long-term commitment.

H3d: The interaction between involvement and CSR type will have an indirect effect on the outcome variables through comprehensive commitment.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Experimental Design

This study examined participants' ($N= 433$) perceptions of one of four one-page corporate CSR advertisements that varied in terms of CSR type and involvement. A 2X2 factorial experiment (see Table 3-1) was designed with two between-subject variables: CSR type (partnership versus donation) and involvement (high versus low). Participants were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions (HP, LP, HC, LC) in which they read one message (See Appendix A). After reading the assigned CSR message, participants completed a posttest.

Table 3-1. Conditions of the 2 X 2 Experimental Design

High Involvement—CSR Partnership (HP), $n=108$	High Involvement—CSR One-time Donation (HC), $n=118$
Low Involvement—CSR Partnership (LP), $n=115$	Low Involvement—CSR One-time Donation (LC), $n=92$

Sample

This study used a convenience sample of 433 undergraduate students aged 18-28 with an average age of 20 who were enrolled in a required public speaking course. Most

participants were female ($n=263$, 61%). Participants were recruited by an electronic posting to the course's webpage. The study survey was anonymous, though an additional survey followed that allowed the participants to enter personal information for extra credit. Extra credit was then awarded in the form of one percentage point added to participants' final class average for completing the study.

A post hoc power analysis using G*Power (Erdfelder, Faul, & Buchner, 1996) was used to assess the statistical power achieved by the study. Given the sample size ($N=433$), an omnibus ANOVA of main and interaction effects would have had 0.55 power to find small effects ($f=0.1$) given a customary threshold for statistical significance ($\alpha=0.05$). With a slightly larger than small sample size ($f=0.175$), an ANOVA that modeled the main and interaction effects would have had 0.95 power under the same assumptions, and 0.99 power for medium effects ($f=0.25$). Except for small effects, there was a significant expectation that this study would have found an interaction had one existed. Thus, it is unlikely that null results can be attributed to insufficient power except for small effects.

Stimuli and Experimental Conditions

This study's manipulations (see Appendix A) were intended to represent that which might be found on a corporate webpage or a one-page spread in a magazine. Participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions. All four conditions used the same environmental cause and the same hypothetical corporate source in their advertisement. All four messages also had the same formatting, with a brief biographical

paragraph about the hypothetical sponsoring corporation and a statement about its respective CSR program that followed.

To manipulate CSR type, two of the conditions (HP, LP) mentioned a partnership as the corporation's CSR campaign, whereas the other two (HC, LC) mentioned a cause-related donation CSR campaign. In the partnership messages, a hypothetical non-profit that was based off an existing environmentally-focused NPO was also included. This study chose hypothetical corporations and NPOs to avoid any familiarity references from participants, which may have skewed how participants perceived the corporation based on factors other than those being studied. Additionally, the sponsoring corporation was part of a neutral industry and was not related to environmental issues in terms of production or practice so as to avoid confounding perceptions of fit, where a participant may judge the program's effectiveness based its ability to address industry-related issues (Simmons & Becker-Olsen, 2010).

To manipulate involvement, each of the two types of CSR included a high involvement and low involvement version, with the high involvement version mentioning the cause as nearby (in Texas), and the low involvement mentioning the cause as distant (in England). The choice to manipulate involvement by location was based on its success in past research (Petty & Cacioppo, 1979; MacInnis & Park, 1991). Previous studies have manipulated involvement by adjusting the immediacy of an issue to an individual. For example, by adjusting an issue's location, researchers can increase its perceived proximity and relevance toward an individual. Petty and Cacioppo's (1979) study used two groups of university students to test high and low involvement. Each

group was exposed to one message; the high involvement group's message stated that a particular issue would affect their university's campus, whereas the low involvement group's message stated that the same issue would affect another university's campus. Results indicated that the high involvement group was more focused on the issue and viewed it with greater importance than the low involvement group (Petty & Cacioppo, 1979). This study's CSR issues were manipulated in a similar way.

Dependent Variables

Attitude toward the initiative. Attitudes were measured using Priester and Petty's (2003) 7-point semantic differential index. Participants were asked six questions to measure their attitudes toward the CSR initiative mentioned in the message. Participants who were assigned to a condition that included a partnership answered the questions based on their perceptions of the partnership initiative, and those assigned to a donation condition subsequently answered based on their perceptions of the donation. The semantic differential index was anchored with negative-positive, harmful-beneficial, foolish-wise, bad-good, and unfavorable-favorable terms. Previous studies have found this measure to be reliable (Lin, 2005), and this study also found it to be satisfactorily reliable (see Table 3-2).

Perceptions of initiative effectiveness. To measure participant perceptions of initiative effectiveness, a modified version of Menon and Kahn's (2003) perceived CSR index was used. Questions three, four and five were modified to reflect the environmental cause that participants viewed in the stimuli advertisement. A 7-point Likert-style rating scale was used within the following five questions: (1) [This

corporation] is genuinely concerned about consumer welfare, (2) [This corporation] believes in philanthropy and giving generously to worthy causes, (3) [This corporation] likely to follow environmental rules and policies, (4) [This corporation] is highly involved in environmental activities (5) [This corporation] is genuinely concerned about environmental issues. Previous research found the measure to be reliable (Lin, 2005; Menon and Kahn, 2003) as did the present study (see Table 3-2).

Commitment. Measures of corporate CSR commitment do not exist in current literature (Maignan and Ferrell, 2000) and were developed for this study. Five Likert-style items measuring long-term commitment included (1) The corporation demonstrated a real interest in making an impact to help the cause, (2) The corporation is capable of long-lasting beneficial effects toward the cause, (3) The corporation will more than likely make a large impact toward helping the cause, (4) The corporation seemed to feel strongly about helping the cause, and (5) This corporation seems like they will support the cause for a long period of time. This scale was found to be reliable for this study (see Table 3-2).

Questions measuring comprehensive commitment also included five Likert-style items: (1) The CSR program appeals to people affiliated with the corporation *and* people affiliated with the cause, (2) The corporation seemed more interested in promoting itself than the cause, (3) The CSR program will equally benefit the corporation and the cause it claims to support, (4) The corporation will benefit more from the CSR program than the cause, and (5) The cause will benefit more from the CSR program than the corporation. This measure was not found to be internally consistent

using all five items, so it was modified. For the analysis, comprehensive commitment included only two items, which were together satisfactorily reliable (see Table 3-2).

Table 3-2. Reliability of Outcome Variables

	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	α	2	3	4
1 Attitude toward initiative	5.57	.993	430	0.93	.316	.384	.067
2 Initiative Effectiveness	5.35	.905	433	0.89		.768	.190
3 Long-term Commitment	5.21	.942	432	0.86			.198
4 Comprehensive Commitment	3.28	1.26	432	0.70			

Note. Index means, standard deviations, participants responding, Cronbach's alpha, and zero-order correlations. All correlations are significant ($p < .01$).

Manipulation Check of Independent Variables: CSR Type and Involvement

A manipulation check to evaluate the first independent variable, the CSR type that participants viewed in the assigned stimulus, asked respondents to rate four Likert-type items based on what they saw in the message: (1) The corporation mentioned a defined partnership with a specific non-profit organization, (2) The corporation mentioned donating a specific percentage of money to the cause, (3) The corporation mentioned a particular promotional campaign with a date range, and (4) The corporation did *not* mention a time frame for how long the sponsorship would last. Because both partnership conditions and donation conditions saw the same four manipulation check statements, the study expected participants in the partnership conditions to rank

statements one and four higher, as they were true for the partnership advertisements, and questions two and three lower, as they were true for the donation advertisements (which they did not see). Similarly, they study expected participants in the donation conditions to rank statements two and three higher, and one and four lower for the same reason. The mean results of each question were compared by condition in a t-test to determine whether participants correctly perceived the type of CSR to which they were exposed.

Consistent with the expectations for the manipulation, participants in the partnership conditions (HP, LP) were more likely ($t [430]=-10.765, p<.001$) to report that their advertisement included a specific partnership with a nonprofit ($M=5.565, SD=1.44$) than those in the donation conditions (HC, LC) ($M=3.852, SD= 1.853$). Similarly, participants in the partnership conditions were more likely ($t [430]= -9.650, p<.001$) to report that their advertisement did *not* mention a time frame for how long the sponsorship would last ($M=5.650, SD=1.606$) than the donation conditions ($M=3.938, SD=2.066$).

Also as expected, participants in the donation conditions were more likely ($t [430]=23.205, p=.493$) to report that their advertisement mentioned a specific campaign date range ($M=5.761, SD=1.541$) than in the partnership conditions ($M=2.368, SD=1.498$). Participants in the donation condition were also more likely ($t [429]=27.640, p=.001$) to report their advertisement mentioned donating a specific percentage of money to the cause ($M=5.995, SD=1.284$) than in the partnership conditions ($M=2.270, SD=1.498$).

A manipulation check for involvement asked two questions and participants ranked their responses on a Likert scale from one to seven. Questions included (1) How important are environmental issues in Texas (or England) to you personally? (2) To what extent do you think environmental issues in Texas (or England) affect you or those around you? Participants were more likely to report that environmental issues were important to them in the high involvement partnership condition ($M=4.06$) and high involvement donation conditions ($M=3.89$) than in the low involvement partnership condition ($M=3.24$) and low-involvement donation condition ($M=2.91$). Similarly, Participants were more likely to report that environmental issues affected those around them in the high involvement partnership condition ($M=4.1$) and high involvement donation condition ($M=4.03$) than in the low involvement partnership condition ($M=3.27$) and low-involvement donation condition ($M=2.89$). This was modeled after a study of involvement in which the manipulation check was successful (Lin, 2005). Similarly, this study found this manipulation to be a reliable measure of involvement ($\alpha = .77$).

To study the aforementioned hypotheses, this study used several statistical tests. An ANOVA test was used to investigate the main effects (H1) and interactions (H3a-b) hypothesized. The Hayes PROCESS macro (version 2.11) was then used to assess the indirect effects of CSR type and involvement through long-term commitment and comprehensive commitment (H2 and H3c-d). Chapter 4 details the results of those analyses.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This study conducted several quantitative analyses to determine the validity within each of the hypotheses. This section explains the results of an omnibus ANOVA test for hypotheses 1a-b, the results of the Hayes PROCESS procedure regarding simple mediation for hypotheses 2a-d and 3c-d, and finally the results of one-tailed ANOVA tests for hypotheses 3a-b.

Hypotheses Testing

H1: Partnerships' Effect on Participant Attitudes Toward the Initiative and Perceived Initiative Effectiveness

H1 predicted that participants would have more positive attitudes toward the initiative (H1a) and greater perceptions of CSR initiative effectiveness (H1b) when viewing a partnership than when viewing a one-time donation. The means reflecting these comparisons are reported in Table 4-1. An omnibus ANOVA test was conducted to compare CSR type on perceptions (specifically, the main effect of a partnership versus a donation on attitudes toward the initiative and initiative effectiveness). H1a and H1b were not supported. There was no significant difference in attitudes toward the initiative ($F [1, 426] = 0.771, p = 0.380, \text{partial } \eta^2 = 0.002$) or perceptions of initiative effectiveness ($F [1, 429] = 2.583, p = 0.109, \text{partial } \eta^2 = 0.006$) when participants were exposed to the partnership message conditions (HP, LP) versus the donation message conditions (HC, LC). Therefore, these results suggest CSR partnerships were no more likely to produce

positive attitudes toward the initiative or perceptions of initiative effectiveness than CSR donations, inconsistent with H1a and H1b.

Table 4- 1. Partnership versus Donation Message Conditions by Involvement and CSR Type

	<i>Partnership</i>	<i>Donation</i>
Attitude toward the initiative	5.61 (0.99)	5.52 (0.99)
High Involvement	5.43(0.89)	5.24 (0.93)
Low Involvement	5.41 (0.91)	5.32 (0.87)
Initiative Effectiveness	5.42 (0.89)	5.27 (0.91)
High Involvement	5.76 (0.97)	5.47 (1.09)
Low Involvement	5.55 (1.01)	5.58 (0.86)
Long-term Commitment	5.32 (0.90)	5.10 (0.97)
High Involvement	5.32 (0.94)	5.05 (1.01)
Love Involvement	5.31 0.87)	5.15 (0.93)
Comprehensive Commitment	3.21 (1.23)	3.24 (1.29)
High Involvement	3.27 (1.17)	3.23 (1.27)
Low Involvement	3.35 (1.29)	3.25 (1.32)

Note. Means with standard deviations in parentheses. *N*=432.

H2: Perceptions of Corporate Commitment as a Mediator

H2a-d predicted that the perceptions of long-term commitment and comprehensive commitment would mediate the effects of CSR type on the dependent

variables, initiative effectiveness and attitudes toward the initiative. Specifically, H2a predicted that the effect of CSR type on attitudes would be mediated by the perception of a *long-term* corporate commitment to the cause, while H2b predicted that the effect of CSR type on initiative effectiveness would be mediated by the perception of a *long-term* corporate commitment to the cause. Additionally, H2c predicted that the effect of CSR type on attitudes would be mediated by the perception of a *comprehensive* corporate commitment to the cause, while H2d predicted that the effect of CSR type on initiative effectiveness would be mediated by the perception of a *comprehensive* corporate commitment to the cause (See Figures 4-1, 4-2, 4-3, 4-4).

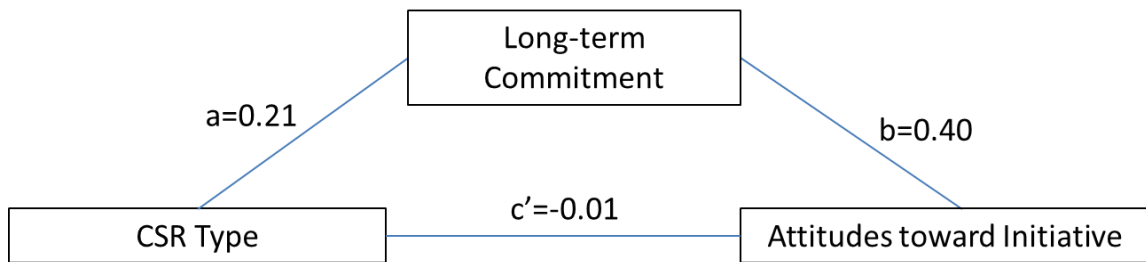


Figure 4-1. Long-term commitment as a mediator of CSR type's effect on consumer attitudes toward the initiative.

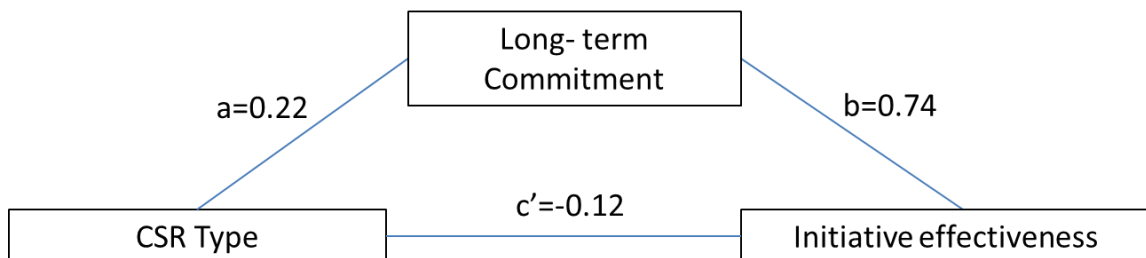


Figure 4-2. Long-term commitment as a mediator of CSR type's effect on perceptions of initiative effectiveness.

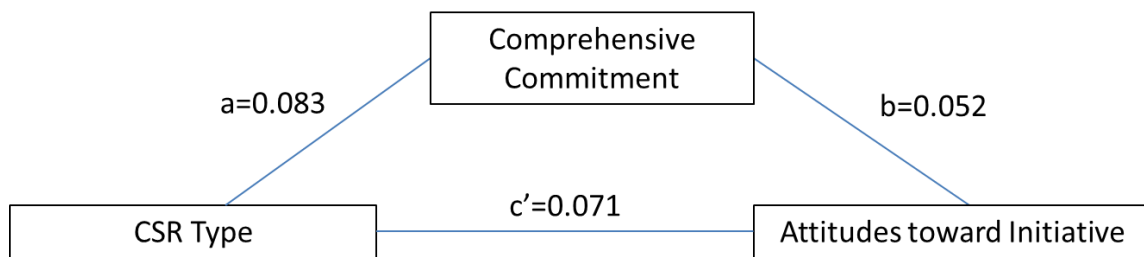


Figure 4-3. Comprehensive commitment as a mediator of CSR type's effect on consumer attitudes toward the initiative.

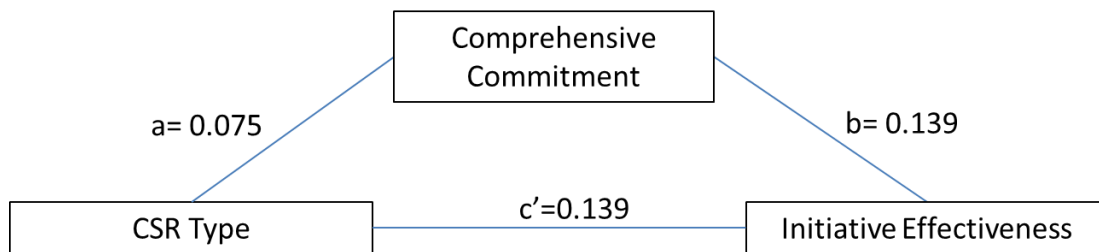


Figure 4-4. Comprehensive commitment as a mediator of CSR type's effect on perceptions of initiative effectiveness.

This study utilized the procedures detailed by Hayes (2013) and the PROCESS 2.11 macro to test for mediation. Per Hayes's recommendations, the OLS regression approach with bias-corrected bootstrap resampling with 10,000 iterations was used (Hayes, 2009). The results report the independent variables' (X) effect on the mediator (M), as well as the mediators' effects on the dependent variable (Y) for each model through the bootstrapped coefficients, standard errors, 95% confidence intervals, and the R^2 . The same data is then reported for the combined model of direct and indirect effects as an indicator of explanatory power (see Table 4-2).

H2a: Long-term commitment and attitudes toward the initiative. Regarding H2a, long-term commitment had a significant indirect effect on the relationship between CSR type and attitudes toward the initiative when participants evaluated a partnership initiative (see Table 4-2a). Although partnerships did not have a direct effect on the outcome of attitudes (as discussed in H1a), perceptions of long-term commitment did mediate an indirect effect (*coefficient* = 0.076; *SE* = 0.095; *CI* = 0.015, 0.176).

H2b: Long-term commitment and perceptions of initiative effectiveness. Similarly, long-term commitment had a significant indirect effect on the relationship between CSR type and perceptions of initiative effectiveness when participants evaluated a partnership initiative (see Table 4-2b). Although partnerships did not have a direct effect on the outcome of initiative effectiveness (as discussed in H1b), perceptions of long-term commitment did mediate an indirect effect (*coefficient* = 0.149; *SE* = 0.087; *CI* = 0.030, 0.287).

H2c: Comprehensive commitment and attitudes toward the initiative. Regarding H2c, comprehensive commitment did not have a significant indirect effect on the relationship between CSR type and attitudes toward the initiative. There was no direct effect of partnerships on attitudes (again, in reference to H1a), nor was there an indirect, mediated effect from comprehensive commitment (*coefficient* = 0.071; *SE* = 0.095; *CI* = -0.006, 0.34) (see Table 4-2c). Thus, comprehensive commitment as a mediator of the effect of CSR type on attitudes was rejected.

H2d: Comprehensive commitment and perceptions of initiative effectiveness. Regarding H2d, comprehensive commitment did not have a significant

indirect effect on the relationship between CSR type and perceptions of initiative effectiveness. There was no direct effect of partnerships on initiative effectiveness (again, in reference to H1b), nor was there an indirect, mediated effect from comprehensive commitment (*coefficient* = 0.071; *SE* = 0.095; *CI* = -0.006, 0.340) (see Table 4-2d). Thus, comprehensive commitment as a mediator of the effect of CSR type on perceptions of initiative effectiveness was also rejected.

Table 4-2. Regression Coefficients, Boot Standard Errors, and Model Summary Information for Outcome Variables in Serial Mediator Models

Table 4-2a. Long-term commitment as a mediator between CSR type and attitudes

	(M) Long Term Commitment				(Y) Attitudes toward the Initiative			
Antecedent		<i>Coeff.</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>		<i>Coeff.</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>
X (Partnership)	<i>a</i>	0.211	0.090	0.020	<i>c'</i>	-0.009	0.089	0.915
<i>M</i> (Long-term Commitment)	--	--	--	--	<i>b</i>	0.402	0.047	<.001
<i>Constant</i>	<i>i₁</i>	5.100	0.065	<.001	<i>i₂</i>	3.481	0.248	<.001
<i>R</i> ² = 0.013				<i>R</i> ² = 0.148				
<i>F</i> (1,427)=5.446, p=.020				<i>F</i> (2,426)= 36.841, p<.001				

Table 4-2b. Long-term commitment as a mediator between CSR type and initiative effectiveness

		(M) Long-term Commitment				(Y) Initiative Effectiveness		
Antecedent		<i>Coeff.</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>		<i>Coeff.</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>
X (Partnership)	<i>a</i>	0.217	0.090	<.001	<i>c'</i>	-0.012	0.058	0.837
M (Long-term Commitment)	--	--	--	--	<i>b</i>	0.739	0.030	<.001
<i>Constant</i>	<i>i_l</i>	5.098	0.065	0.017	<i>i₂</i>	1.504	0.158	<.001
<i>R</i> ² = 0.013				<i>R</i> ² = 0.590				
<i>F</i> (1, 430)=5.798, <i>p</i> =0.017				<i>F</i> (2, 429)=308.011, <i>p</i> <.001				

Table 4-3. (Continued)

Table 4-2c. Comprehensive commitment as a mediator between CSR type and attitudes								
		(M) Comprehensive				(Y) Attitudes toward the		
		Commitment				Initiative		
Antecedent		<i>Coeff.</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>		<i>Coeff.</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>
X (Partnership)	<i>a</i>	0.083	0.122	0.494	<i>c'</i>	0.071	0.095	0.455
M (Comprehensive Commitment)	--	--	--	--	<i>b</i>	0.052	0.038	0.172
<i>Constant</i>	<i>i₁</i>	3.231	0.088	<.001	<i>i₂</i>	5.366	0.140	<.001
<i>R</i> ² = 0.001					<i>R</i> ² = 0.006			
<i>F</i> (1, 427)= .469, <i>p</i> = 0.494					<i>F</i> (2, 426)=1.249, <i>p</i> = 0.288			

Table 4-2d. Comprehensive commitment as a mediator between CSR type and effectiveness

		(M) Comprehensive				(Y) Initiative Effectiveness		
		Commitment						
Antecedent		<i>Coeff.</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>		<i>Coeff.</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>
X (CSR type)	<i>a</i>	0.075	0.121	<.538	<i>c'</i>	0.139	0.086	0.105
<i>M</i> (Comprehensive Commitment)	--	--	--	--	<i>b</i>	0.135	0.034	<.001
<i>Constant</i>	<i>i_l</i>	3.237	0.087	<.001	<i>i₂</i>	4.833	0.126	<.001
<i>R</i> ² = 0.009					<i>R</i> ² = 0.246			
<i>F</i> (1,430)= 0.381, <i>p</i> =.538					<i>F</i> (2,429)= 9.409, <i>p</i> <.001			

In sum, H2a and H2b were supported as there was an indirect effect of CSR type on the two dependent variables, perceptions of initiative effectiveness and attitudes toward the initiative, when a long-term corporate commitment was made clear within the initiative. H2c and H2d were rejected as there was no indirect effect of CSR type on either of the dependent variables when comprehensive commitment was made clear within the initiative.

H3: Participant Involvement as a Moderator

This study expected the involvement level of each participant to moderate his or her perceptions of commitment, and to have an interaction on the overall indirect effect of CSR type on the outcome variables (attitudes toward the initiative and perceptions of initiative effectiveness). Specifically, H3a-b predicted that participants who were more involved would perceive greater long-term commitment (a) and comprehensive commitment (b) from the corporation than those less involved, and that these perceptions would interact with the type of CSR they viewed. H3c-d suggested that involvement might be the trigger factor for the indirect effect of the mediator (perceptions of commitment) to have an effect on the outcome variables. Specifically, it predicted that participants who were more involved would perceive greater long-term and comprehensive commitment, which would then lead to an indirect effect of more positive attitudes toward the initiative and greater perceptions of initiative effectiveness.

For H3a-b, a one-tailed ANOVA test that measured the interaction effect of partnerships and involvement on perceptions of both long-term and comprehensive commitment. For H3a, the test results suggested there was not a significant interaction between high involvement partnerships and perceptions long-term commitment ($F [1, 428] = .210, p = 0.271, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .001$). Therefore, involvement did not act as a moderator for the effect of CSR type on perceptions of long-term commitment and H3a was rejected.

Regarding H3b, test results also neglected to show a significant interaction between high involvement and perceptions of comprehensive commitment ($F [1, 428] =$

.061, $p = 0.403$, *partial* $\eta^2 < .001$). Therefore, involvement did not act as a moderator for the effect of CSR type on perceptions of comprehensive commitment either, and H3b was rejected.

For H3c, the Hayes PROCESS macro (version 2.11) was used to determine the indirect effect of interaction between CSR type and the outcome variables when mediated by both long-term and comprehensive commitment. Test results did not suggest an interaction between involvement and the indirect effect of CSR type on attitudes (*indirect effect of interaction* = 0.040, $SE = 0.074$, $CI = -0.102, 0.188$) or perceptions of initiative effectiveness (*indirect effect of interaction* = 0.082, $SE = 0.135$, $CI = -0.178, 0.353$) when mediated by long-term commitment. Test results also neglected to show an interaction between involvement and the indirect effect of CSR type on attitudes (*indirect effect of interaction* = -0.002, $SE = 0.016$, $CI = -0.048, 0.024$) or perceptions of initiative effectiveness (*indirect effect of interaction* = -0.008, $SE = 0.035$, $CI = -0.080, 0.062$) when mediated by comprehensive commitment.

In sum, H3a-d were rejected. For H3a-b, involvement failed to act as a moderator on perceptions of the proposed mediator variables, long-term and comprehensive commitment. For H3c-d, there was no significant interaction between involvement and the indirect effect of CSR type on the outcome variables when either long-term commitment or comprehensive commitment was used as a mediator. Thus, results from H3a-b suggest that regardless of whether or not the participant was highly involved with an issue, it is likely that they perceive the level of corporate commitment to an initiative in similar ways. Additionally, results from H3c-d suggest there is no real difference in

perceptions of initiatives in terms of attitudes or initiative effectiveness based on the proximity of an issue to an individual, even when individuals perceive different levels of long-term and/or comprehensive commitment from the corporation.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES

This study sought to compare individuals' reactions to two common forms of CSR initiatives, corporate/NPO partnerships and one-time cause-related donations. Several earlier studies have explored how different types of CSR have varying effects on perceptions, though more research was needed that looked particularly at partnerships as compared to donations (Drumwright, 1996; Lafferty & Goldsmith, 1999; Dean, 2004; Alter & Oppenheimer, 2008). The question that provoked this study asked why partnerships, among other types of CSR, have become such a common type of CSR for corporations in recent years (Mutch & Aitken, 2009).

By testing the effect of CSR type on attitudes toward the initiative and perceived initiative effectiveness, this study adds a new dimension to CSR literature in terms of understanding how individuals differentiate (or do not differentiate) between two common types of CSR. In addition to this main effect, this study also examined the indirect effect of corporate commitment between partnerships and attitudes as well as partnerships and perceptions of initiative effectiveness.

Practitioner Implications for Selecting the Most Effective CSR Initiative **Effects of Commitment on Perceptions of Initiative Effectiveness and Attitudes** **toward the Initiative**

H2a-d looked at whether the type of CSR initiative used had an indirect effect on individuals' attitudes and/or perceptions of initiative effectiveness by way of perceived commitment as a mediator. Previous scholarship suggested partnerships, among other

types of CSR, possess a level of commitment that is likely to be seen as genuine because it allows for the utilization of resources over a longer period of time than that of a one-time corporate donation (Mutch & Aitken, 2009). Scholarship also noted that genuine attentiveness to the needs of both the corporation and the cause is more readily apparent in a partnership because both the non-profit and the corporation's managerial staff work together to promote what is best for both of their respective entities (Ihlen et al., 2011).

Based on this research, two forms of commitment thought to have a mediating effect were perceptions of long-term commitment and comprehensive commitment. However, only long-term commitment had an indirect effect on attitudes and initiative effectiveness. In line with previous research, a long-term commitment may address the concern of consumer skepticism that corporations have seen in the past, as genuineness from the corporation will be clear if a long-term commitment is explicitly publicized (Dean, 2004; L'Etang, 2004). The main takeaway is that corporations should stress their interest in promoting the chosen social cause for a long period of time in an effort to increase positive perceptions of their initiative.

In contrast, comprehensive commitment did not have a mediating effect. This may mean that participants did not care whether the corporate and the cause benefit equally. It may be instead that as long as the cause is clearly identified as a recipient of legitimate sponsorship, individuals expect the corporation will benefit indirectly. However, it is important to note that these results may also reflect the problematic measure used for comprehensive commitment. The measure asked for participants' level of agreement that the corporation would benefit *more* than the cause in the CSR

program. To better understand participants' feelings toward comprehensive commitment, future studies should examine whether participants think the corporation and cause *should* benefit equally, or if it even matters to individuals if the corporation benefits at all.

Partnerships versus Donations on Perceptions of Initiative Effectiveness and Attitudes toward the Initiative

Though the findings suggested different outcomes from what was originally expected regarding partnerships' effect on attitudes and perceptions of effectiveness, practitioners can still note some valuable implications about the results in terms of choosing the best initiative for their corporation. This study's findings suggest that individuals evaluate partnerships and corporate donations in similar ways, and both types of CSR were viewed quite positively. However, partnerships were more likely to have an indirect effect on perceived initiative effectiveness and attitudes toward the initiative (Y) through perceptions of long-term commitment (M).

This is an intriguing discovery for both public relations practitioners and corporate managers. This means the proliferation of partnerships in recent years as the preferred type of CSR may more reflect corporations mimicking their competition rather than proven positive responses from the public. Corporate managers and practitioners they should feel confident in choosing a CSR initiative that works best with their corporation's limitations and strengths, rather than trying to force the implementation of a particular type of CSR merely based on what their competition is promoting or what is popular. Though if practitioners do choose to implement a partnership, they should do so

to build long-term commitment. From the findings of this research, partnerships may be perceived as involving long-term commitment, yet it may be possible for other forms of CSR to appear genuinely dedicated if the initiative benefits the cause more often than merely a one-time attempt. For example, if a corporate donation is made on a consistent, annual basis for five years, this could be perceived as a genuine, long term commitment without being classified as a partnership.

Effects of Involvement on Perceptions of Commitment

Finally, H3a-b's high versus low involvement levels did not achieve the effects that this study initially expected for either type of CSR. Based on previous research, it was hypothesized that involvement level would moderate perceptions of corporate commitment. Specifically, a participant who is more involved with an issue would be more likely to perceive higher levels of both long-term and comprehensive commitment, based on the type of CSR (Becker-Olsen & Hill, 2005). However, findings suggested there was no interaction between CSR type and involvement level on perceptions of long-term commitment or comprehensive commitment. More specifically, whether individuals are highly involved with an issue or are distantly affected by it, the type of CSR publicized does not affect their perceptions of corporate commitment, or given the substantial power in the study design, any effect may be small.

Additionally, hypotheses H3c-d posited that involvement would have an effect on perceptions of initiative effectiveness and attitudes toward the initiative through individuals' perceptions of corporate commitment. However, no interaction was found among involvement and the mediator's effect on participant attitudes toward the

initiative or perceptions of initiative effectiveness. Thus, participants' involvement with an issue did not influence their perceptions toward either the corporation's level of commitment toward the cause, nor did it affect their overall attitudes toward the initiative or perceptions of initiative effectiveness. This means that regardless of how involved an individual is with a cause, it should not affect how they view an initiative as a whole.

One should note that the lack of interaction may also be related to the design of the manipulation. In previous manipulations of involvement that were successful (e.g., Petty & Cacioppo, 1979), researchers used the participants' university as a reference for a high involvement location and a distant university as a reference for a low-involvement location. Unlike previous research, this study's locations were on a larger scale due to the phenomena being tested (Texas versus England). This difference may have contributed to participants' perception of their own involvement level (i. e. an involvement in global, rather than simply domestic, environmental awareness may have caused the unexpectedly high interest in England's environmental health).

Despite these shortcomings, these findings remain valuable as they suggest some interesting implications for practitioners who are interested in creating a CSR campaign. In sum, if individuals are likely to perceive similar levels of commitment from corporations who claim to benefit a cause, regardless of whether the initiative is a partnership or a corporate donation, corporate managers and public relations practitioners have more freedom to choose both a cause that is important to their corporation and the type of CSR that works best with their strengths and limitations.

However, if a corporation does choose to implement a partnership, it is important to note that stressing a long-term commitment to a cause should serve to further increase positive perceptions from the public. Additionally, in line with CSR scholars' suggestions, sponsoring a cause that fits with the corporation's mission may increase the genuineness of the CSR initiative, regardless of its proximity to the public or the type of CSR through which it is employed (Becker-Olson & Hill, 2007). Because genuineness is likely to combat issues of consumer skepticism that have plagued the industry in previous years, this means that an initiative with a genuine cause and a stress on a long-term commitment is likely to be perceived most positively among other CSR initiative competition.

Limitations and Future Research Opportunities

There are several additional limitations to note. First, this study was conducted with undergraduates from one university, meaning that generalization is inherently limited. Even still, this sample should provide reasonable evidence about the underlying mechanisms of effects that partnerships have on individuals' perceptions. Previous research indicates college-age students in the young adult demographic (18-28 years of age) are more likely to be influenced to make a lifestyle change in the name of the environment (Reed, et. al 2005; Sax, 2004), suggesting this target audience was useful for studying generic aspects of about how CSR type affects individual's perception of CSR initiatives. However, perceptions of commitment, attitudes and effectiveness of the initiative are likely to vary more depending on the audience.

Second, it is highly unlikely that someone will view a message or be exposed to campaign where they are unfamiliar with both the source and the non-profit being publicized. Communication and marketing scholars suggest much of today's corporate communication is based off of two-way interaction with the consumer (J. Grunig & L. Grunig, 1992). That is, much of the information that corporations publicize is based off of what the public has deemed important or public reactions to previous messages from the corporation. CSR messages are often created in similar ways, though this study did not examine that perspective. Instead, hypothetical entities were chosen to purposefully remove any hint of familiarity in an effort to control the testing of main effects. Therefore, these findings are limited in that they can only explain how viewers perceive credibility if familiarity is *not* a factor, whereas in day-to-day life this is likely not the case. Future research might incorporate both hypothetical and real-world examples through message replication within conditions to better understand if there are differences between individuals' perceptions of CSR initiatives from familiar and unfamiliar sources, and to what extent they are based off a two-way symmetrical communication model (J. Grunig & L. Grunig, 1992).

Third, after running the results, this study's scale for initiative effectiveness, an outcome variable, was found to have strongly correlated results with the scale for long-term commitment, a mediator variable. After considering that both scales may have unintentionally measured the same thing, all of the ANOVA tests and Hayes PROCESS tests used in the previous results were re-run with a modified version of the long-term commitment scale that included only the questions that specifically mentioned a time

period (questions two and five). However, these results were relatively the same as those from the initial scale. The internal consistency of the modified scale ($\alpha = .59$) was not considered reliable, though it would have likely increased had there been more than two items. Future research may want to modify this study's long-term commitment scale to include multiple questions that are specifically time-related in an effort to increase the internal validity of the results.

Finally, the reader should note that this study used only one message design for each of the four conditions. As Jackson (1992) suggests, messages can be composed in an unlimited number of ways and with a variety of features; therefore the manipulation change in message features between conditions (e.g. message text) requires acute differences be made. This was the case for this study's four messages, as each message only differed by location (Texas or England) type of CSR (partnership or donation) and the presence or lack of a date range for the campaign. Even still, O'Keefe (2003) suggests the combination of message features (length of text, words chosen, font etc.) have their own effect on the participant, as one combination of features may be perceived differently from another equally useful combination of message features based on the participant's attraction to the external details that are not being tested as part of the experiment. Future research may want to incorporate message replication within conditions to represent a variety of aesthetic details within the message design. This will allow researchers to better understand whether these extraneous factors contributed to participants' overall perceptions toward the initiative.

CONCLUSION

Corporate social responsibility initiatives have become ubiquitous in the current business culture. As individual expectations of corporations increase beyond mere business achievements, their expectations of corporate CSR initiatives also increase. To tackle consumer skepticism, corporations are not only implementing these CSR initiatives, but also publicizing their comparative effectiveness. Even with the potential limitations, this study's findings remain valuable as they suggest some relevant implications for practitioners who are interested in creating a CSR campaign. Mainly, an emphasis on long-term corporate commitment is key to increasing positive perceptions in light of growing CSR competition; especially because results indicate that individuals tend to view both partnerships and donations in positive ways. This means corporations and public relations practitioners have the freedom to choose the type of CSR that works within their limitations and strengths as well as a cause that is important to their corporation. Stressing the corporation's long-term commitment is likely to further increase positive perceptions of initiatives, and partnerships may be more likely to be sustained over time. Understanding how to increase positive perceptions amidst an era of CSR proliferation will allow practitioners to overcome consumer skepticism, increase corporate reputation and benefit the community simultaneously.

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APPENDIX A STIMULI MESSAGES PER CONDITION

CONDITION 1 HP: HIGH INVOLVEMENT PARTNERSHIP



Moxar Toys Inc. is one of the largest toy manufacturers in Texas.

Because we make our products for future generations, we think it's important to show we care about our young customers in other ways too. Sustainability is an investment at Moxar, just like the education of our children. We feel it is important to care for the earth now in order to ensure its health in the future, which is why Moxar is proud to partner with Earth Unlimited Inc. to educate consumers on living more sustainable lives.



MOXAR IS PROUD TO PARTNER WITH EARTH UNLIMITED INC.



Earth Unlimited Inc. is a non-profit organization based in Texas that is dedicated to protecting Earth's natural habitats by educating consumers about environmental abuse and creating responsible solutions. Thanks to contributions from supporters like Moxar, Earth Unlimited has conserved more than 13 thousand acres of land in Texas by educating consumers on how to live their everyday lives in a more sustainable way.

CONDITION 2 LP: LOW-INVOLVEMENT PARTNERSHIP



Moxar Toys Inc. is one of the largest toy manufacturers in England. Because we make our products for future generations, we think it's important to show we care about our young customers in other ways too. Sustainability is an investment at Moxar, just like the education of our children. We feel it is important to care for the earth now in order to ensure its health in the future, which is why Moxar is proud to partner with Earth Unlimited Inc. to educate consumers on living more sustainable lives.



MOXAR IS PROUD TO PARTNER WITH EARTH UNLIMITED INC.



Earth Unlimited Inc. is a non-profit organization based in London, England that is dedicated to protecting Earth's natural habitats by educating consumers about environmental abuse and creating responsible solutions. Thanks to contributions from supporters like Moxar, Earth Unlimited has conserved more than 13 thousand acres of land in England by educating consumers on how to live their everyday lives in a more sustainable way.

CONDITION 3 HC: HIGH-INVOLVEMENT CORPORATE DONATION



Moxar Toys Inc. is one of the largest toy manufacturers in Texas.

Because we make our products for future generations, we think it's important to show we care about our young customers in other ways too. Sustainability is an investment at Moxar, just like the education of our children. We feel it is important to care for the earth now in order to ensure its health in the future, which is why Moxar is proud to donate 10 percent of every dollar we earn during our "Save the Trees" campaign, (September 1-December 1) to city-wide conservation awareness programs throughout Texas in order to educate consumers on living more sustainable lives.



MOXAR IS PROUD TO DONATE TO CITY-WIDE CONSERVATION AWARENESS PROGRAMS.



Moxar is dedicated to protecting Earth's natural habitats by promoting programs that educate consumers about environmental abuse and creating responsible solutions. Thanks to contributions from supporters, educational programs have allowed consumers to conserve more than 13 thousand acres of land in Texas.

CONDITION 4 LC: LOW-INVOLVEMENT CORPORATE DONATION



Moxar Toys Inc. is one of the largest toy manufacturers in England. Because we make our products for future generations, we think it's important to show we care about our young customers in other ways too. Sustainability is an investment at Moxar, just like the education of our children. We feel it is important to care for the earth now in order to ensure its health in the future, which is why Moxar is proud to donate 10 percent of every dollar we earn during our "Save the Trees" campaign, (September 1-December 1) to city-wide conservation awareness programs throughout England in order to educate consumers on living more sustainable lives.



MOXAR IS PROUD TO DONATE TO CITY-WIDE CONSERVATION AWARENESS PROGRAMS.



Moxar is dedicated to protecting Earth's natural habitats by promoting programs that educate consumers about environmental abuse and creating responsible solutions. Thanks to contributions from supporters, educational programs have allowed consumers to conserve more than 13 thousand acres of land in England.

APPENDIX B

POSTTEST

Q1. Please give your impressions of the advertisement's CSR initiative on each of the questions below. If you have no feeling one way or the other, please choose 4 as a neutral option.

For Partnership conditions (HP), (LP):

To what extent do you agree with the adjective regarding the corporate partnership ?									
1	Negative	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Positive
2	Harmful	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Beneficial
3	Declining	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Improving
4	Foolish	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Wise
5	Bad	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Good
6	Unfavorable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Favorable

For cause-related donation conditions (HC), (LC):

To what extent do you agree with the adjective regarding the corporate donation ?									
1	Negative	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Positive
2	Harmful	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Beneficial
3	Declining	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Improving
4	Foolish	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Wise
5	Bad	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Good
6	Unfavorable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Favorable

*Q2. Please evaluate how you feel about the corporation's **environmental CSR policies AND the statement provided by the corporation**. Please circle the number that best indicates your agreement with each item. The index is ordered Strongly Disagree (1), Neutral (4) and Strongly Agree (7).*

To what extent do you agree with the following statements?	Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree						
(1) This corporation is genuinely concerned about consumer welfare	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(2) This corporation believes in philanthropy and giving generously to worthy causes	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(3) This corporation likely to follow environmental rules and policies	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(4) This corporation is highly involved in environmental activities	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(5) This corporation is genuinely concerned about environmental issues	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(6) The corporation demonstrated a real interest in making an impact to help the cause	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(7) The corporation is <i>capable</i> of long-lasting beneficial effects toward the cause	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(8) The corporation will <i>more than likely</i> make a large impact toward helping the cause	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(9) The corporation seemed to feel strongly about helping the	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

cause	
(10) This corporation seems like they will support the cause for a long period of time	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
(11) How important are environmental issues in Texas (England) to you personally?	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
(12) To what extent do you think environmental issues in Texas (or England) affect you or those around you?	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
(13) The CSR program appeals to people affiliated with the corporation <i>and</i> people affiliated with the cause	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
(14) The corporation seemed more interested in promoting itself than the cause	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
(15) The CSR program will equally benefit the corporation and the cause it claims to support	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
(16) The corporation will benefit more from the CSR program than the cause	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
(17) The cause will benefit more from the CSR program than the corporation	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Q3. Please answer the following questions based on what you saw within the message.

(1) The corporation mentioned a defined partnership with a specific non-profit organization	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
(2) The corporation mentioned donating a specific percentage of money to the cause	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
(3) The corporation mentioned a particular promotional campaign with a date range	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
(4) The corporation did <i>not</i> mention a time frame for how long the sponsorship would last	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Demographic Information:

What is your major?	[Fill in the blank]
What is your age, in years?	[Dropdown menu]
What classification year are you at your university?	Freshman Sophomore Junior Senior
What is your race?	American Indian/Alaska Native Asian Black or African American Hispanic or Latino Pacific Islander White (non-Hispanic) Other
What is your gender?	Male Female

Please note that this partnership is a hypothetical example of a Corporate Social Responsibility campaign and does not actually exist. It has been used as a representation of the forms of corporate CSR that exist today. This study is in no way affiliated with any particular corporation or nonprofit organization, nor does it seek to promote either party in any way other than the educational purposes of this research. [End of Posttest]